

If you have ever been in a situation with a serious illness in your family and you had no health insurance, you will never forget it. It happened to me and my wife. We will never forget it as long as we live. I do not want to see another family in that situation. Repealing ObamaCare could create it. I hope we have the good sense to vote down the Vitter amendment and stand for good, affordable health insurance for working families whether they work in the private sector, the public sector, or Congress, and to make sure they have an employer contribution so that health insurance is affordable.

The Vitter amendment is a step back in time. It is a step back in time that will eliminate the protection of health insurance for literally thousands if not millions of Americans. That is not the way to go. I would say to the Senator from Louisiana it makes no sense to the working families of America.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Michigan.

#### NAVY YARD TRAGEDY

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I wish to say a brief word about yesterday's tragic and senseless violence at the Washington Navy Yard.

The men and women who protect our Nation and the men and women in uniform and the thousands who serve the Department of Defense make enormous sacrifices for us. Facing a workplace gunman should not have been one of them. Those who have died, their wounded, their families, and loved ones are in our thoughts and in our hearts today.

#### SYRIA

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I come to the floor this morning to discuss another senseless act of violence and our Nation's response.

In the early morning hours of August 21, the Syrian military began firing artillery rockets into the suburbs east of Damascus, hitting neighborhoods held by opposition forces that had been fighting to end the brutal dictatorship of Bashar al Assad.

We know from the accounts of independent observers such as Human Rights Watch, the work of our intelligence services, and those of our allies, that many of these rockets were armed with warheads carrying sarin, a deadly nerve gas. We know these rockets were launched from areas under the control of Assad's regime, using munitions known to be part of Assad's arsenal, and into areas held by opposition forces. We know from the report of the U.N. weapons inspectors released yesterday that the weapons used, both the rockets and the chemicals themselves, were of professional manufacture, including weapons known to be in the Syrian Government's arsenal. There is no other source of this deadly gas except the Syrian Government. Nothing else makes any sense whatsoever.

President Obama declared that the United States would act in response to this threat to global security. He determined it was necessary to use American military force to degrade Assad's chemical capability and deter future use of such weapons by Assad or others. He did so because a failure to act would weaken the international prohibition on chemical weapons use. He did so because the failure to act could lead to greater proliferation of these weapons of mass destruction, including the potential that they could fall into the hands of terrorists and used against our people. He did so because if the use of chemical weapons becomes routine, our troops could pay a huge price in future conflicts.

On September 4, a bipartisan majority of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved the President's request for an authorization of the limited use of military force.

Faced with this credible threat of the use of force and in response to a diplomatic probe by Secretary Kerry, Russia—which had for more than 2 years blocked every diplomatic initiative to hold Assad accountable for the violent repression of his people—announced that Assad's chemical arsenal should be eliminated.

The agreement that followed requires Syria to give up its chemical arsenal on a historically rapid timetable.

Within a week Syria must fully account for its chemical weapons stockpiles and infrastructure. By the end of November, U.N. inspectors must be allowed to complete their assessments and key equipment used to produce chemical agents must be destroyed. All of Syria's chemical stocks, materials and equipment must be destroyed by the end of next year.

Any failure to abide by the terms of the agreement would lead to consideration of penalties under Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter, under which the U.N. Security Council may authorize among other steps "action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security." Regardless of U.N. action or inaction, the President retains the option of using force if Assad fails to fully comply.

This agreement is a significant step toward a goal we could not have achieved with the use of force. The authorization approved by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had the stated purpose of degrading Assad's chemical capability and deterring the use of chemical weapons by Assad or by others. What can now be achieved is more than degrading and deterring. We may be able to eliminate one of the world's largest stockpiles of chemical weapons.

We should have no illusions that achieving this outcome will be easy. First are the technical and logistical challenges. Many have expressed concern about the likelihood that Assad's stockpiles can be secured and disposed of as quickly as this agreement pro-

vides—by the end of 2014—especially given the dangerous security environment in Syria. I share these concerns. But accepting and addressing these challenges is a better course than not acting against the certain danger of leaving these weapons in the hands of a brutal dictator allied with Hezbollah, a dictator who has demonstrated a willingness to use them against civilians.

Some have expressed doubts that Assad and Russia will follow through on the agreement which was reached in Geneva. To address these doubts, we must inspect, verify, and continue to hold open the option of a strike against Assad's chemical capability if he fails to fully abide by the Geneva agreement.

What I do not understand is why some of the same voices who called for the United States to get Russia to end its obstructionism now criticize the President for getting the Russians involved. I was disappointed to hear my Michigan colleague, Congressman MIKE ROGERS, make the irresponsible claim that this agreement amounts to "being led by the nose" by Russia. This contradicts his previous statements that we need to put pressure on Russia to get involved in a solution to the Syrian threat.

Chairman ROGERS has also said: "What keeps me up at night: We know of at least a dozen or so sites that have serious chemical weapons caches" in Syria, and stressed the urgency that "all the right steps are taken so that we don't lose these weapons caches and something more horrific happens."

Thanks to U.S. pressure and a threat to take military action in response to Assad's use of chemicals, the Russians are finally getting involved in getting Syria to respond. We have taken a major step toward securing these chemical weapons as Chairman ROGERS himself so strongly urged.

We need not rely on good intentions from those who have not shown good intentions in the past. It was the credible threat of the use of military force that brought Russia and Syria to the bargaining table. It is a continued credible threat of military force that will keep them on track to uphold the provisions of that agreement.

The President has made it clear, and rightfully so, that "if diplomacy fails, the United States remains prepared to act."

Secretary Kerry, standing right beside his Russian counterpart in Geneva, emphasized this agreement in no way limits President Obama's option to use force if it becomes necessary.

Many of our colleagues have stressed repeatedly in recent weeks that the credible force, the credible threat of military force, is essential to reining in Assad. I strongly agree. For the life of me, I cannot understand why those who have taken that position would now argue, as some of those same colleagues are arguing, that the Geneva agreement is somehow of little or no